

Australian King-parrot

Alisterus scapularis

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Hunter Bird
Observers Club

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An adult male Australian King-Parrot (photo: Steve Merrett)

Description

This is a large, noisy and spectacular-looking parrot. Adult males have a bright red head and underparts, and mostly dark-green upperparts. The innermost upper-wing coverts are bright blue-green, creating a very obvious shoulder patch. The iris is yellow, upper mandible orange-red, tail dark and the bird has a deep-blue rump. Adult females have a red belly and red-tinged green chest, but their throat and head are bright green and their bill is completely dark (i.e. both the upper and lower mandibles).

Juvenile birds resemble adult females except for their bill which is pale (a buff/brown colour). The first moult occurs at 3-6 months of age and then a second moult, into adult plumage, happens at around 12 months. Immature

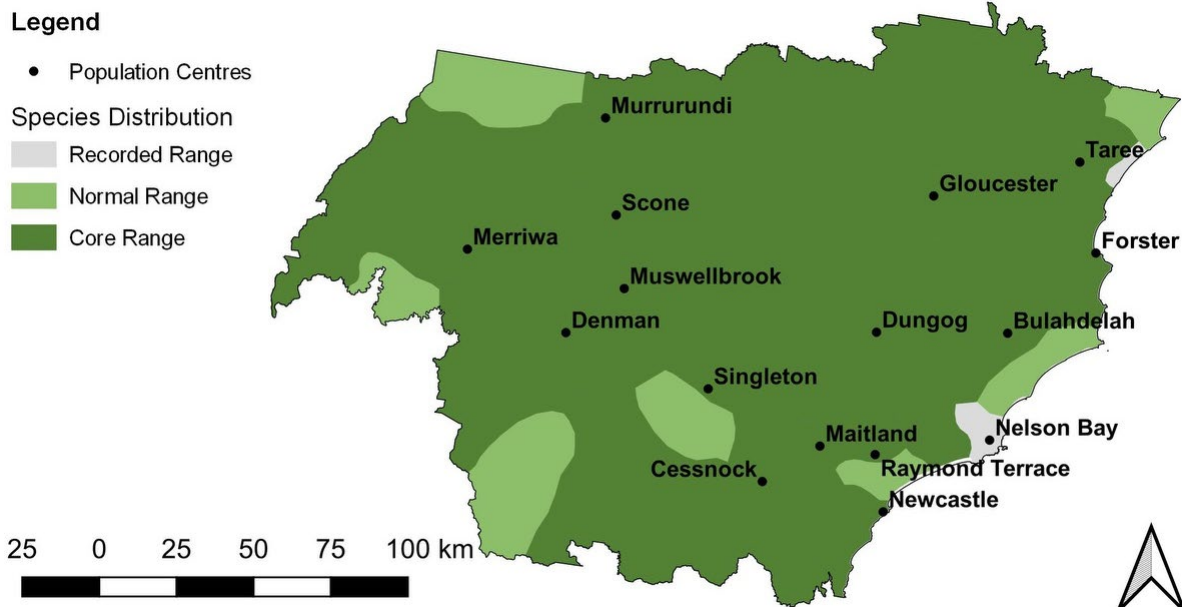
males develop progressively more red plumage on their breast and head during the two moults, and the lower mandible darkens to black while at the same time the upper mandible develops orange-red characteristics.



A female Australian King-Parrot – note the all-dark bill (photo: Rob Palazzi)

Regional Status

The Australian King-Parrot is a widespread breeding resident of our region, found in forests, woodlands and gardens throughout the region and also occurring in wooded farmland tracts. There are very few places where it isn't regularly recorded.



Distribution map for Australian King-parrot (map prepared by Dan Williams)

Sub-species

Two sub-species are recognised. Subspecies *minor* occurs as three separated populations in the Queensland wet tropics. Subspecies *scapularis*, the Southern Australian King-Parrot, is found from about Rockhampton to the outskirts of Melbourne, mainly in coastal forests and on the slopes of the Great Dividing Range.

About the name

As explained below, our bird has an unusual characteristic – it is named to honour two people.

Australian King-parrot

Originally, our bird was named as King's Parrot, in honour of Philip King, the NSW Governor at the time of the bird's discovery in the early 19th Century. The apostrophe didn't take long to disappear and it was called the King Parrot for about 150 years. Then, in a new checklist issued in 1978, the RAOU added the hyphen. The reasons for that decision are unknown. The IOC checklist has dropped the hyphen but it is still retained for the BirdLife International checklist.

Three species of King-Parrot are currently recognised – Moluccan, Papuan and Australian. There are numerous subspecies, especially of the Moluccan species.

Alisterus scapularis

Not many birds are named after four-year-olds, but this one is. Gregory Matthews, the prominent Australian ornithologist who first described the species, had a young son named Alister! The species name is from the Latin word *scapulae*, meaning shoulders or shoulder-blades, in recognition of the bird's brilliant blue-green wing patches.



A young male Australian King-Parrot – note the red colours developing in head and throat, and an orange-red bill appearing (photo: Mick Roderick).

Design Rob Kyte at Conservation Matters 0420 821 460 **Text** by Alan Stuart based on information mainly sourced from • HBOC's Hunter Region annual bird report series • Volumes 1-7 of HANZAB (the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds) • Bird in the Hand (ABSA information sheet series) • Menkhorst et al. (2017). The Australian Bird Guide • Ian Fraser & Jeannie Gray (2013). Australian Bird Names. A Complete Guide • Richard Schodde and Ian Mason (1999). A Directory of Australian Birds (Passerines).
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